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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

Testimony of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Hearing on H.R. 5068, the Women Who Worked on the Home Front World War II
Memorial Act
Submitted on December 4, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Haaland, for holding a hearing on the Women Who Worked on the Home Front World War II Memorial Act.

This bill would authorize the establishment of a memorial on federal land in the District of Columbia commemorating both the efforts of the 18 million American women who kept the home front running during World War II and the thousands of women who directly assisted the war effort, often behind the scenes. Women are dramatically underrepresented in our memorials.

Later in this hearing, you will hear testimony from my 17-year-old constituent Raya Kenney, the founder of the non-profit Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation. She came up with the idea to honor the women on the home front who supported the World War II effort, and I am supporting her endeavor. Raya noticed that the women on the home front, whose efforts were so instrumental in maintaining the stability of the country during World War II, have not received much recognition for their contributions, compared to the men who fought bravely in World War II. I agree.

This bill would authorize the Women Who Worked on the Home Front Foundation to establish a memorial to honor these women. The memorial would be interactive to educate visitors on the important roles women played during World War II.

Between 1940 and 1945, the percentage of women in the workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent, including 25 percent of married women. The work done by women on the home front opened doors for women in the workplace itself and had a profound effect on the job market going forward. The women on the home front redefined many occupations that were previously considered "men's work."

As women were working on the home front, many others played critical roles directly supporting the war effort. More than 10,000 women served behind the scenes in World War II as codebreakers. Due to the classified nature of their work, they did not receive recognition for their tireless efforts until recently.

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Women were also trained to fly military aircraft so male pilots could leave for combat duty overseas. More than 1,100 female civilian volunteers flew nearly every type of military aircraft as part of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program. WASP flew planes from factories to bases, transported cargo and participated in simulation strafing and target missions. These women were not given full military status until 1977, and it was not until 2010 that they were recognized with the Congressional Gold Medal.

Women have largely been ignored in the memorials on federal land in the nation's capital, even though they played a key role in World War II. During this time, American women redefined what "women's work" looked like, from codebreaking and flying aircraft to health care and factory work. Women took jobs to support their families and their country. In light of these contributions, it is time that women who worked on the home front be properly recognized in the nation's capital.

Chairman Haaland, I appreciate you holding this hearing, and I strongly urge my colleagues to support this legislation.